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ABSTRACT

A 1972 survey of female and male naval offficers indicated that most men had little difficulty seeing women as effective managers, but doubted that women should serve in active service, or as line or commanding officers. The women saw their status as inferior to males, with junior officers more disssatisfied over inequality and more in favor of female sea duty. Changes over the past five years have not produced greater acceptance of, or orientation for, the female naval officer. Women, in 1977, overwhelmingly saw equalized opportunity, including shipboard and aviation billets, as essential. However, to prevent resentment among all personnel, caution should be used in placing women in desirable shore and shipboard billets. To make up for past inequities and to assist capable female personnel in career advancement, junior women officers should be encouraged to take on responsibilities previously undertaken only by male or senior female personnel. (LS)

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SYMPOSIUM: NEW ROLES FOR MILITARY WOMEN

THE FEMALE NAVAL OFFICER: WHAT IS HER ROLE?

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INTRODUCTION

The presence of women in the military, in any but the traditionally feminine support roles, is looked upon by many as counter to a defense posture. Not only are women believed to be physically inferior to men, and thus unable to wage war as effectively, but they may interfere with male bonding. That is, the introduction of females may preclude the formation of an all-for-one, one-for-all spirit that has pulled fighting men through many a difficult battle. Additionally, some see a military establishment with a visible female component as a reflection of national weakness and a threat to social order. The importance of these beliefs has been witnessed on several occasions in the Congress during hearings on bills affecting military women. An early example of such arguments occurred in 1942 during debate on the establishment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), the predecessor of the Women's Army Corps (WAC).

> I think it is a reflection upon the courageous manhood of the country to pass a law inviting women to join the armed forces in order to win a battle. Take the women into the armed service, who then will do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself? Think of the humiliation! What has become of the manhood of America? (Congressional Record, 17 March 1942 as quoted in Treadwell, 1954, p. 25.)

An example of the reasoning that women will affect esprit de corps is found in the testimony of ADM Worth Bagley, (then Vice Chief of Naval Operations) during the 1975 hearing on the bill to admit women to the service academies.

> Men join the Navy for many different reasons; however, a certain portion join and remain in the Navy because they enjoy being in a job which has been historically associated with fellowship among men in a difficult and dangerous endeavor. Changing the fabric of the Navy by integrating women into all combat roles might well reduce the attractions of the Navy to this segment of mankind, as well as to some of those men who might, in the future, join the Navy and make it a career (Hearings before House Armed Services Committee as cited in Binkin and Bach, 1977, p. 91).

Thus, women choosing to enlist or be commissioned in the armed forces are challenging both civilian and military preconceptions.

Female military officers start their careers under additional disadvantages. First, they are affiliating with an androcentric institution that overtly favors male careers over female because of the greater utility of men as leaders in the defense establishment. For this reason, they may never enjoy the support of a senior officer mentor nor, except for a fortunate few, be able to compete with the elites of the officer corps, male military academy graduates. Second, their professional role is fraught with ambiguity and even anomaly. Woman officers are not a badly needed human resource, as are enlisted women, because there is no parallel shortage of male officers in the fields to which females are restricted. Also, their original function and raison d'etre of managing enlisted women and providing the military with a trained nucleus in the event of mobilization have all but disappeared. This situation creates a quasi-separate corps of women officers, a separateness that is heightened by the contemporary dualism of equal opportunity forces vying against protectionist legislation.

The first woman naval officers were commissioned in 1942 to plan for recruiting, training, and administering of the WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service). Their status differed from male reserve officers in that the highest rank permitted was lieutenant commander and all commissions expired 6 months after the end of World War II. While permanency in the regular Navy was assured by legislation enacted in 1948, the role of woman officers in peacetime was not as clearly defined as during mobilization. After receiving training similar to many male officers, the careers of women took a very different bent. Because of service policies, they had little expectation of attaining a leadership position or succeeding to command except at a training center for enlisted women. Instead, they were rotated from one administrative position to another, spending most of their time in Washington, D. C. or at major stateside bases. Navy personnel managers continually faced the problem of how to utilize female officers, particularly as they became progressively more

senior in grade, within established restrictions and without interfering with the normal career progression of males. However, since woman officers represented less than .2% of the Navy, the numbers were few and the concern minimal.

During the 1960s, a redefinition of the role of women was beginning to have an impact upon many institutions within American society. However, even by the early 1970s, the military appeared to be untouched by the feminist movement. As a woman officer noted in a 1972 article, despite the ongoing effort to create a more "human" environment in the Navy, which was occurring under ADM Zumwalt's leadership, no consideration had been given to the treatment of female personnel (Coye, 1972). The author maintained that:

> Society in general is attempting to understand and resolve the dissonances between the feminine ideal as traditionally understood and the role reality of the American woman in the working environment. Navy personnel generally, however, have dismissed this new movement as ridiculous or amusing, believing that the Navy is immune to implications of, and can therefore remain aloof from, the resurgent feminist movement. The basis for such a hypothesis is questionable, however, and the need for Navy management to be more responsive to the changing image for the American women is manifest to this writer. (p. 53)

Coye argued that affirmative action from among the ranks of woman officers would be slow in developing because of the traditionalism of senior officers and the powerless position of the restless junior officers. Moreover, she noted that any woman officer, senior or junior, would be reluctant to actively pursue greater sexual equality because of the tenuous status of female officers within the naval organization and fear of a negative impact upon her career. Coye suggested, however, that it was only a matter of time before the changing attitudes toward women's role in the public sector would affect the Navy's ability to attract and retain female personnel.

To test these beliefs, Coye, Denby, Hooper, and Mullen administered a survey to 267 female and 185 male line officers in April of 1972. The questions focused on

the utility of having women as line officers of the U. S. Navy, the problems faced by woman officers, and attitudes that might support a less traditional role for women. The responses indicated that the majority of male officers had little difficulty seeing women as effective managers but expressed doubt in their abilities as line officers and commanding officers. Seventy-four percent of the men did not think women should go to sea or fly in military planes. Women's responses indicated that they saw their status as inferior to that of their male counterparts. Junior officers expressed more dissatisfaction than senior over unequal opportunities and were more in favor of sea duty for women (65% of junior officers versus 47% of senior). On a question worded, "the primary role of women naval officers, as I understand it, currently is," the most frequently chosen response by both women and men (of the 7 options available) was "not clearly defined and therefore probably misunderstood at all levels." The authors concluded that true commitment to equal opportunity for woman officers would require reform.

Since 1972, several significant changes in policy affecting female naval officers have been effected. The quasi-separate chain of command, embodied in a woman representative at various command levels, has been abolished. The civil engineering and chaplain corps have been opened to women along with command positions ashore and flag rank. Also, women have been admitted to the Reserve Officer Training Corps, flight training and the Naval Academy. It is possible that these gains resulted from the expressed discontent of the junior officers sampled in Coye et al's research and/or some enlightenment at higher levels regarding the underutilization of women.

The current study was designed to determine whether midlevel officers of 1977 hold equalitarian beliefs toward their role in the Navy. Since the lieutenants and lieutenant commanders in this group would have been among the junior officers in Coye et al's sample, such an investigation explores the change in orientation

that may occur with advancement in rank. Additionally, the experiences and perceptions of woman line officers who still cannot serve on the naval "line," were examined and compared to those of enlisted women.

PROCEDURE

This study was part of a larger research project investigating the attitudes and satisfaction of women in the Navy. To achieve this end, a multifaceted survey was developed and administered to over 400 women throughout operational commands in the Pacific. Commissioned officers who responded to the survey also completed the 15-item Officers' Supplement, which included 12 items from the Coye et al. questionnaire. Because the sample of officers obtained during the project was not representative of all ranks, additional respondents were obtained in Washington, D. C. and Norfolk, Virginia. The final stratified sample of 102 women represents 8% of the female line officers in the Navy. Fifty-six of these women were junior officers (ensigns and lieutenants, junior grade), whose average length of naval duty was less than 3 years. The remaining 46 were midlevel officers, the majority of whom had been with the Navy for 6-10 years. It is the latter group that is of particular interest, since they represent the younger officers of Coye's study.

While the survey, called the Women in the Navy Questionnaire, contained many different types of items, only the following analyses will be discussed in this paper:

1. Attitudes of junior and midlevel officers toward role of women.
2. Distributions of responses to questions concerning experiences in the Navy.
3. A comparison of the attitudes of woman officers and enlisted women toward facets of their naval careers.
4. A comparison of the responses of contemporary woman officers to those of woman officers in Coye's study.

The sample of 378 enlisted women, whose responses were compared to the total officer sample, was obtained during the larger research effort using the survey.

RESULTS

Analysis of the background questions revealed that one-half of the officers were married but only 4 percent had children. Their ages ranged from 21 to 46 and averaged 27 years. In order to determine the feminist orientation of the officers by rank, a bivariate analysis was conducted for 10 items on the role of women. Distributions of responses on these questions are presented in Table 1. Overall, officers expressed far more contemporary attitudes toward their role than did enlisted women or Navy wives who were surveyed in fiscal year 1977 (Note 1). Ensigns were least in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment, with 63 percent endorsement of question 1, while lieutenant commanders were most in favor (88% endorsement), a difference that is significant at the .01 level. While the distributions were identical for one-third of the items, midlevel officers tended to exhibit a stronger feminist orientation than junior officers. This finding is contrary to that of Coye et al. who reported that junior officers were the more egalitarian in their work roles.

One question on the survey probed personal role affiliation and was prefaced by the statement, "The contemporary view of male/female role involves husbands and wives sharing domestic and financial responsibilities. The traditional view assigns primary responsibility for the home and children to the woman and the man provides the financial support." Eight-five percent of the officers subscribed to the contemporary role, 10 percent were traditionally oriented, and 5 percent were undecided. There was no significant difference between the responses of junior and midlevel officers on this question, but 4 of the 5 undecided responses came from the junior officers. This finding is consistent with their greater indecisiveness on the ERA, suggesting that some of these young officers are still in a formative state in respect to their role as women.

Table 2 presents the distributions of responses to 8 questions concerning the experiences of woman naval officers. A feeling of rejection as full professionals is apparent in these results. Only 25 percent of the officers stated they had never been expected to do certain feminine jobs that were not a part of their duties, while all but 45% felt they had received favorable treatment because of their sex. A major problem emerges in the responses to question 3 concerning resentment from men for taking up shore billets. This finding is consistent with the results of administering the survey to enlisted women, 76 percent of whom responded "yes" to this item (Note 1). Yet, as one woman wrote on the back of her questionnaire, "This (resentment) is totally illogical. Sea duty tours are established by the needs of the fleet and shore duty comes only out of what is left over. If there were no women in the Navy, shore duty billets would simply be left unfilled and sea duty tours would be the same length as they are now." However, despite the difficulties encountered that led to the results reported on this table, 86 percent of the sample stated they would join the Navy again if they had it to do over.

Table 3 presents a comparison of the attitudes of female officers and enlisted personnel toward aspects of being in the Navy. These two samples differed significantly at the .01 level in their responses to all but question 3, on which two-thirds of both groups agreed that negative attitudes of men cause many women to leave the Navy. In general, officers expressed more positive attitudes than the enlisted women, as evidenced by question: 1, concerning confidence in the chain of command; 2, the image of Navy women among civilians; 7, opportunities for women in the Navy; 8, personal pride in the Navy; and 9, the feelings of self-worth engendered by their work. Responses given to question 4 indicate that the officers chafed against what are viewed as paternalistic Navy policies while half of the enlisted women favored the protection afforded by such policies. A comparison of the responses to question 5 testifies to the woman officers' greater belief in the importance of shipboard experience to their careers. The 71 percent disagreement of the enlisted women is

most likely a reflection of the ratings that the majority of them occupy; ratings Navy women have traditionally held because of the opportunities for advancement on shore.

The results of readministering 11 of Coye et al's key questions are presented in Table 4. The table also includes 2 additional items designed to measure attitudes toward issues of contemporary concern to woman officers. A pattern of greater polarity is apparent in that very few of the women in the current sample lacked an opinion, as compared to those in the 1972 study. Comparisons of the two samples did not yield significant chi-squares for items 2, 9, and 11, indicating that now, as in 1972, woman officers feel they have little difficulty dealing with male subordinates, that the opportunities for women who wish to develop their potential are not adequate, and that female and male officers are not treated equally. The highly significant chi-squares obtained for questions 1, 3, 4 and 8, testify to the greater interest of the current sample in gaining full status as a naval officer. The majority opinion of 1972 that female officers should have the same opportunities and responsibilities as male officers, is now almost unanimous. Responses to items 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11, however, indicate strong pessimism about acceptance by men. Coye had hypothesized that, based on the replies of male officers to the survey, greater opportunity for women would not meet with majority resistance. It now appears that, as the opportunity gap between the sexes narrows, woman officers are feeling considerable resistance. Replies to question 6 reveal that despite their often expressed dislike for a quasi-separate corps, 87 percent of the respondents felt that attention at the Chief of Naval Operations level will be required during the integration period to prevent sexual discrimiantion. Apparently, Navy management agrees, since a CNO Coordinating Board for Women is currently being staffed.

Question 12, a new item, is concerned with attitudes toward Navy management's effort to provide female line officers with a career pattern that can be equated to that of male line officers. While half of the women agreed that this goal is

being accomplished, junior officers were more doubtful than midlevel officers (48% disagreement versus 39%). Responses to question 13 indicate that the majority of those with an opinion feel that the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (a bill in the Congress) will have a negative impact on the career opportunities of women.

The results presented in Table 5, which addresses the role of the woman officer in the Navy, indicate that half of the respondents still consider their role to be ambiguous. These women appear to have more of a sense of purpose than in 1972, however, in that none thinks she exists to free men for sea duty and significantly more believe the need for their individual talents and skills is responsible for woman officers being in the Navy.

CONCLUSIONS

Advancement in rank has not resulted in a more traditional orientation for the midlevel female naval officer of the 1970s. The women who responded to this survey were overwhelmingly in favor of equality of opportunity for Navy men and women. They see shipboard and aviation billets as essential to being competitive with male line officers and as widening their career options. While such attitudes will be seen as encouraging by those responsible for selecting women for duty aboard the support vessels that are soon to be sexually integrated, two notes of caution should be sounded. First, if these women officers are to be believed, negative male attitudes are affecting their professional development and causing many women to leave the Navy. Assigning females to ships would appear to relieve male resentment over women taking up shore billets. However, because the designated ships on which women will serve seldom leave port for extended periods, the danger exists that Navy men will see their access to another form of desirable duty restricted by the presence of Navy women. Thus, easing the restriction against women on ships may exacerbate an already difficult situation.

The second caution raised by these data is based on the strong desire of the midlevel officers to achieve full status as line officers, best expressed by a woman who wrote, "to volunteer for naval service is to volunteer for it all--not just the light duty, not just the clerical work, and not just the support functions." If these officers are denied the opportunity to go to sea, because they lack the experience needed to assume the shipboard responsibilities of their rank, a great deal of dissatisfaction is likely to occur. While it may be unorthodox for a lieutenant commander to serve as a division officer, a job usually held by an ensign or lieutenant, j.g., female lieutenant commanders with 10 years of naval experience could progress rapidly to the next management position aboard ship. Such a policy of accommodation to right past inequities would better serve the Navy's needs than losing career officers, either in actuality or in spirit.

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Table 1

A Comparison of Attitudes of Junior - (N=56)
and Midlevel - (N=46) Officers Toward Role of Women

Question	Percentage of Officers			
	Junior		Midlevel	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. If the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) were put to a popular vote, I would vote for it.	73	11	80	9
2. If the law were changed so that women were assigned to ships, I would get out of the Navy.	18	63	11	80
3. Women should be allowed to work at any job they are capable of performing.	100	0	100	0
4. Parents should guide their children into traditional roles appropriate for their sex.	2	95	6	83
5. Some women are able to be good wives, good mothers, and good employees simultaneously.	82	4	98	2
6. Women should take a supportive position in marriage and the world of work rather than trying to be the leaders.	0	91	2	89
7. Most women cannot stand the stress associated with being a high level manager or a commanding officer.	4	84	2	93
8. Certain civilian and military jobs are so unfeminine that women should be excluded.	0	98	2	98
9. Women should not compete with men for promotions because a man's career is more important.	0	100	0	100

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 because the "Undecided" response is not included.

Table 2

Responses of Woman Officers to Questions Concerning Their Experiences in the Navy (N = 102)

Question	Percentage		
	Yes	Sometimes	No
1. Have you ever been expected to do certain jobs that are not a part of your rating just because you are female (typing, coffee, etc.)?	58	17	25
2. Have you been made to feel like the Navy is a man's world, and you don't belong?	41	45	14
3. Have you experienced resentment from men who accused women of taking their shore billets?	63	23	14
4. Have you experienced favoritism because of your sex? (For example, your supervisors let you get away with something or do less work because you are a woman?)	31	24	45
5. When you are assigned to a new workgroup or given a new task, do most men assume you will not perform well? In other words, do you have to go through a period of proving yourself just because you are a woman?	45	33	22
6. Are people at higher levels of the Navy aware of the problems at your level?	24	52	24
7. Have you experienced resentment from wives of Navy men with whom you come in contact?	35	33	22
8. If you had it to do over again, would you join the Navy?	86	7	7

TABLE 3

Comparison of Attitudes of Female Officers and Enlisted Personnel Toward Aspects of Navy Career

Question	Percentage of Respondents				X^2
	Officer (N=102)		Enlisted (N=378)		
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	
1. When I have a personal problem I can seek advice using the chain of command and not have to worry about snide remarks, or a betrayal of confidence.	57	43	30	70	27.99*
2. Among civilians, the image of a female in the military services is favorable.	52	48	22	78	37.38*
3. Negative attitudes of Navy men cause many women to leave the Navy.	67	33	68	32	0.10
4. Navy policies toward women are too protective.	70	30	49	51	14.32*
5. Not going to sea makes it harder for me to advance than it is for men.	63	37	29	71	40.35*
6. If women were assigned to ships, male/female relationships would affect efficiency.	21	79	39	61	10.04*
7. There are better opportunities for women in the Navy than there are in civilian society.	67	33	50	50	9.82*
8. Being in the Navy gives me feelings of self-worth.	90	10	73	27	12.52*
9. My assigned work gives me feelings of self-worth.	77	23	58	42	12.30*

*$p<.01$

Table 4

Woman Officers' Perceptions of Their Status

Question	Percentage Respondents						X^2
	Agree		No Opinion		Disagree		
	'72	'77	'72	'77	'72	'77	
1. Woman officers should be given the same opportunities as their male counterparts, including sea duty and flying status.	57	95	17	2	27	3	42.86**
2. Woman officers have difficulty dealing with males in subordinate positions.	14	15	9	7	78	78	.97
3. The Navy should consider a pilot program in which women serve on board large service type ships; e.g., deep drafts.	69	94	11	3	20	3	20.71**
4. The Navy should consider a pilot program in which women serve on board large combatants; e.g. carriers.	63	89	12	5	25	5	22.14**
5. Woman officers are presently held back in their professional development because of ingrained beliefs held by men that women are not capable managers.	67	75	12	4	22	10	6.24*
6. Until women are truly integrated into the Navy, there will be need for attention from either the Bureau or CNO level to preclude sex discrimination practices and to elevate the status of women in the organization.	75	87	11	5	14	8	6.08*
7. As a group, woman officers experience considerable difficulty in their professional development because the men with whom they work feel the need to be superior (ego, status).	47	63	18	11	35	25	9.30**
8. An effort to change policies to permit women to serve aboard Navy ships would cause more irritation than it would be worth.	31	11	28	6	40	83	47.78**

**p<.01
*p<.05

Table 4

Woman Officers' Perceptions of Their Status

Question	Percentage Respondents						X^2
	Agree		No Opinion		Disagree		
	'72	'77	'72	'77	'72	'77	
9. Opportunities for Navy women who wish to develop their potential are inadequate.	66	67	10	5	23	27	2.12
10. Woman officers are well accepted by Navy men.	44	38	19	7	37	55	13.16**
11. It has been my experience that Navy seniors treat men and women officers as equal.	40	30	6	8	54	62	3.02
12. According to the URL Officer Career Planning Guidebook, "career opportunities for woman officers have never been greater. They are demanding, challenging, and most importantly, possible." Do you agree?	a	52	a	4	a	44	--
13. The provision in DOPMA that places women in competition with men for promotion will have a favorable impact on the careers of most women officers.	a	29	a	25	a	46	--

**p<.01
*p<.05

[a]Not administered in 1972.

Table 5

Self-perceived Role of Woman Naval Officers
1972 and 1977

	Percentage 1972 (N=257)	Percentage 1977 (N=97)	z Ratio of Difference
The primary role of woman naval officers, as I understand it, currently is: (Choose most appropriate answer)			
Not clear to me	4	6	.683
In a state of flux	13	18	1.188
Not clearly defined and therefore probably misunderstood at all levels	39	27	2.116*
To provide a trained nucleus of women in the event of mobilization	7	3	1.290
To free men for sea duty	9	0	2.962**
To fill billets for which women are particularly well suited and which men generally do not consider career-enhancing	14	9	1.288
To provide the Navy with the particular talents and skills of the individual	14	36	4.663**

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$